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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the history of early childhood education in Australia, areas of change in contemporary early childhood education, and the philosophical bases of education. The paper also offers suggestions for the future. From 1880 until 1950, Australian children's services consisted of philanthropic enterprises. The period from 1950 to 1970 witnessed the growth of community-managed services. Since 1970, the government has become much more involved in early childhood education. Today, educators must consider several areas of change in society: (1) the changing role of the family; (2) changes in the work force and the nature of employment; and (3) the growing dependence of society on technology. Although early childhood services had their genesis in the work of eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophers, the work of later theorists has more relevance for current early childhood education. Curtis, for example, discusses the self-awareness and social skills that contemporary curricula should develop in children. A curriculum of skills is recommended. To achieve the goals of the curriculum, early childhood programs should: (1) preserve the concept of childhood; (2) be individualized and flexible; (3) enlist the cooperation of parents; and (4) be revised to keep pace with the changing needs of children. A bibliography containing 47 items is included. (BC)

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CHANGING WORLD, CHANGING EDUCATION

KINDERGARTEN - WHERE TO NOW?

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The concept of early childhood education, that is, education for and of the young child, contains many 'givens'; for instance, early childhood education has been a part of our human life for thousands of years in that it has been used as the vehicle for transmitting social values, beliefs, attitudes and knowledge; secondly, early childhood education has not always been perceived as a place where 'experts' reigned supreme and this notion is epitomised in many ways, e.g. from the 'anyone can do it', 'it's a mother's role', through the philanthropic beginnings of british nursery schools and the days of Head Start in America in which about one quarter of the staff had early childhood training, to the present day, where untrained staff form an influential percentage of centre-based and home-based child care workers; thirdly, the concept that early childhood education is 'all things to all people' in terms of covering a wide range of services in a variety of contexts for children in a wide age span; fourthly, that early childhood education is changing as a reflection of the economic, social and political changes which impact upon our life-style. It has even been suggested that these changes, as reflected in contemporary early childhood services, are more profound than ever before. This may be true for two reasons, the early childhood field may have had a great deal of catching up to do in order to meet contemporary needs, or society itself may be undergoing change of greater dimensions that previously encountered.

Whatever the reasons it seems in Australia, at least, an appropriate time to take stock of the situation in order to try to distinguish themes and links between the various seemingly piecemeal happenings in the world of early childhood services. A good beginning would be to define early childhood education:

> *'Early childhood education is a programmatic effort in which an agent, operating within a context, uses some means, according to some plan, to bring about changes in the behaviour of children between birth and age 8 (years) in terms of some definable criteria.'*
>
> *(Peters et al, 1985:4)*

While we could debate this definition for days in true early childhood fashion, the key words, I believe, are 'agent, 'context', 'plan' and 'criteria'; in other words, we use agents or people to offer a planned programme or service in a particular context (home, centre or school), according to some social, political, economic, educational and technological criteria. These programmes and services could be publicly or privately financed and offered to everyone or restricted to a few (either impoverished or elitist, such is the paradox of early childhood services from an historical point of view.)

The history of early childhood services in Australia is an interesting and colourful story, initially reflecting the philanthropic origins of similar programs in the United Kingdom and USA and then changing direction dramatically and perhaps controversially in the last two decades as governments at all levels and of all persuasions responded to changing economic, social and political patterns.

McNulty (1985) has suggested that the history of children's services in Australia can be divided roughly into three phases. Phase one lasted from about 1880 until 1950 and was characterised by the establishment of voluntary, philanthropically operated services for children and families in need; the second phase (1950-1970) witnessed the uneven growth of community-managed services, initiated and maintained by middle class parents for middle class children who lobbied government for funds while the third phase from 1970 to the present time has been characterised by the enunciation of

government policies on children's services and a major injection of government moneys into child care at least, as well as a somewhat well-disguised commitment to kindergarten services in some form.

The first kindergartens were established in Australia in the 1890's by "middle and upper class ladies of the Kindergarten Unions in working 'slum' suburbs" (Spearritt, 1979:1) of Sydney. These kindergartens operated from 9.00 am until 3.00 pm and were modelled on the kindergarten principles developed by Froebel with an emphasis on play as the medium for children's learning. Each kindergarten was financed by committees of interested 'upper class ladies' rather than the parents of the children attending the centre. Many of these committees had links with other voluntary bodies, including various religious groups, and at some stage in Australia the Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian and Baptist churches have had direct responsibility for the operation of some kindergartens. In addition other groups joined together to form Kindergarten Unions in the various states (New South Wales, 1985, South Australia 1905, Victoria 1908, Western Australia 1912 and Queensland 1916) to administer the rapidly growing group of kindergartens. The growth of these institutions probably reflected the straitened economic times together with the growing awareness, on the part of churches and lay persons, of the need for society to assume some responsibility for young children perceived to be in need. The number of kindergartens grew steadily; by 1910 there were some thirty-two kindergartens around Australia and separate Kindergarten Teachers' Colleges has been established in Sydney (1900) and Adelaide (1907) and later in Brisbane (1911), Perth (1912) and Melbourne in 1916. These colleges formed the basis for contemporary early childhood programs with their emphasis on students developing skills in child observations and child development as a basis for program planning, and the notion of 'play' as the child's way of learning. The kindergarten was seen also as a socialising agent for those recalcitrant children. Although the graduates of such courses had completed three years of training their low salaries probably reflected society's impression of the role of early childhood services within the community. The Karmel Report of 1971 observed that trainees were 'drawn from families which could afford to finance their daughters through a period of training and contribute to their support when as teachers their 'salaries were little more than pocket money' (Karmel, 1971:250).

The Second World War had a great impact upon children's services in Australia, the most important change being the rapid increase in the number of women with young children working in industry. Creches were established under the aegis of the Federal Department of Health and existing sessional kindergartens which extended their opening hours from 7.00 am to 7.00 pm for children aged two years and over were to receive a subsidy from the government. This period and the immediate post war period was a time when the so called middle class parents demonstrated a growing interest in the development of their children. We can only speculate about the reasons for this new found interest, it could be due to the decrease in the number of available domestic servants and 'nannies', the increased voluntary war efforts by many of these women or a reflection of the growing interest in child development and the work of people such as Gesell in Northern America. As 'middle class children' could not be accepted into government subsidised creches unless their mothers were directly engaged in essential war work, there was a push by middle class parents to establish their own kindergartens. In addition some of these mothers had themselves graduated from the Kindergarten training colleges and were aware of the American child psychology movement. These kindergartens were established and operated by parent committees

rather than the traditional operators, the philanthropic groups. However many of these new centres formed an affiliation with the Kindergarten Union, churches or local councils in order to obtain land, buildings, maintenance and qualified staff.

The early childhood scene in Australia in the early 1960's was epitomised by contradictions and inconsistencies, such as various state government departments providing varying degrees of support for voluntary groups to run centres, the Federal Department of Health subsidising a demonstration centre in each state in which 'not only will the methods for the care and instruction of young children be tested and demonstrated, but also problems of physical growth, nutrition and development will be studied' (Brennan and O'Donnell, 1986:19), programs for families covering a wide spectrum of the working class and middle class community, services which appeared to offer either care or education and the Australian Pre-School Association, composed of lay persons, trying to co-operate with the professionals in the field.

During this time the number of women in the work-force grew steadily and the government-prophesied return of the women to the homes at the end of the war did not eventuate. In spite of the fact that the number of married women in paid employment outside their home increased from 18.7% to 32.7% between 1961 and 1971, the government refused to accept that many of these women would have young children in spite of the Bureau of Census and Statistics survey of 1969 which revealed that over a quarter of a million children of pre-school age had mothers in the work-force (Brennan and O'Donnell, 1986:21).

Concomitantly with this data was the growing awareness of the 'startling inconsistencies' in preschool provisions in the various states; for example, 52% of ACT children attended preschool whereas in NSW the figure was 3%. The APA and related groups engaged in lobbying the federal government for an increased financial commitment on the part of that government to preschool services and in fact in 1970 the then Prime Minister, John Gorton, announced that his government "intended to establish a wide network of 'preschool and child-minding centres' which, he claimed, would improve employee morale, reduce absenteeism and help productivity" (Brennan and O'Donnell, 1986:22).

However, the situation may have remained static - and stagnant - had it not been for the advent of a new pressure group into the Australian political scene in 1972 - the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL). This group, and other women's groups, began a process of educating public and politicians alike to the need for child care as a fundamental social right and as a means of redressing sexual discrimination rather than merely as another educational service or a facility in the workplace. Although the Whitlam Labour Government is credited with introducing childcare into the federal sphere it was in fact the coalition government of William McMahon which introduced the Child Act in October, 1972. This Act was a benchmark for early childhood services in Australia in that it enabled the Commonwealth to make both capital and recurrent grants to non-profit organisations (Brennan and O'Donnell, 1986). The Whitlam government assumed power shortly afterwards and took responsibility for implementing this Act. In the soon to be Prime Minister's policy speech, Gough Whitlam promised preschool education for 'every Australian child'. He stated that 'the area of greatest inequality in education is the preschool', and promised to make preschool education available to every Australian child:

'A woman's choice between making motherhood her sole career and following anaother career in conjunction with motherhood depends upon the availability of proper childcare facilities.'

(in Spearritt, 1979:34)

The carefully-nurtured difference between the care and education services did not appear to concern Whitlam, nor did the traditional reluctance of previous federal governments to fund the education field, except at the tertiary level.

The Australian PreSchools Committee, under its chairperson, Joan Fry, was established with the brief of recommending measures to ensure that all children had the opportunity to undertake one year of preschool education and that childcare centres be provided for children of working parents and underprivileged families. Such a brief was in keeping with the new government's platform of social reform in which the role of education was emphasised as an instrument for the promotion of equality. The Fry Committee report reflected its narrow terms of reference and received a great deal of criticism from many quarters including WEL and other women's organisations which had not been included on the Committee, and the federal government, which changed its policy on children's services during the period the Fry Committee was in session. The new section on childcare inserted into the government's policy stated that:

'Comprehensive child care service (is) to be established throughout Australia on a priority needs basis. This service (is) to be government sponsored and community-based ... The aims of the service (are) to be to provide community support for women to participate more fully in society.'

(in Spearritt, 1978:35)

A Social Welfare Commission, with Marie Coleman as its Chairperson, was established to look at the development of preschool and childcare opportunities. Dany Humphreys, writing in the Australian of April 9, 1974 described the ensuing politics as 'a battle between the women's movement, fighting for government provision of twenty-four-hour-a-day childcare centres, and the education lobby, pressing for preschools with childcare as an afterthought for working mothers' (quoted in Spearritt, 1979:36).

The major recommendations of the Social Welfare Commission were accepted by the Priorities Review Staff (PRS) while the Fry Report recommendations were soundly castigated as failing to meet the government's policy. The few reservations of the PRS relating to the Social Welfare Commission's Report centred on its proposal for local government to be the main administrative agency for preschool and childcare and suggested that this responsibility be assigned to a Minister without vested interests in any specialised aspect of the program; presumably to dissipate the infighting which had occurred between Education and Social Security Ministries. Lionel Bowen, Special Minister of State, assumed responsibility for federal funding of children's services through the Interim Committee for the Children's Commission and he claimed that:

'One of the real strengths of the Government's program is that it will break down the false dichotomy between childcare and preschooling. The sad fact is that up until now preschooling, originally intended by us as an important aid in removing or modifying inequalities of background, environment, family income or family nationality, has primarily benefited children whose mothers can afford to stay at home. Not only has this situation put children from

less privileged environments at an even greater disadvantage, but it has created a harmful distinction between the mother at home and the mother at work.'

(in Spearritt, 1979:38)

These were brave words, but the rhetoric has not been matched by reality for a number of social, economic and political reasons. Although all children's services contain components of both care and education and one cannot occur without the other (McNulty, 1985) in 1977 the federal government designated preschool as an education program and it therefore became a state responsibility; child care remained a federal government responsibility but the artificial dichotomy between care and education was emphasised and assured.

Although the basis for funding childcare has been amended from time to time by successive federal governments, the Children's Services Program has continued to expand in a time of economic constraint and the government has been forced to continue to seek ways in which the moneys can be found to maintain the existing program and expand as the demand for places increases rather than decreases. The present economic situation exacerbates the situation as more and more women with young children return to the work-force and place increasing demands upon a system which is not meeting current demands. The preschool programs in the various states and territories continue to seek some reassurance that their educational role is valued and that they will not become revamped childcare centres. The dichotomy continues!

While some practitioners, bureaucrats and parents will continue to agitate for an integrated system of preschool education and care, there are others amongst us who perceive this temporary set back to a cohesive program as a golden opportunity to try to bring the educational component of an early childhood program into the current decade so that it reflects the contemporary and future needs of members of our society. Now that kindergarten programs are funded from the federal education grant to states and territories, it has assumed de facto recognition as part of the educative process so that kindergarten teachers now have to assume responsibility for developing programs that legitimately meet the present and future needs of young children; however, contemporary education is characterised by complexity and uncertainty, and considering the dramatic changes which have occurred in our way of life in the last decade, we must assume that education will continue to reflect the dynamic, uncertain nature of our society into the twenty-first century.

Firstly, we must base our predictions on the understanding that the preschool children of today will be the first adult generation of the twenty-first century, with its Star Wars and Buck Rogers space age phenomena. We will need to prepare this generation, and future generations, to be adaptable and flexible, to have analytical minds to cope with our multicultural, multilingual, multiethnic, multifaceted society of the future. Programs, irrespective of the philosophy on which they are based, must at least take account of the prevailing conditions of social and cultural life; of social, economic and political policies; of local community needs and pressures; and of available resources.

None of us can prophesy, yet we must conjecture to some extent in order to shift our thinking for the new curriculum of the 1990's and the next decade. We are not entirely ignorant; although thoughts about the future can only be speculations based

on our present and past knowledge of the world, we are not entirely without what Peters and Klein (1981) describe as the 'tools of understanding'. Although we cannot predict specifics we do have some knowledge about the way in which social, economic, political and technological factors have brought about changes in the past and are likely to bring about future changes, in addition to changes in our knowledge base about the way children learn and the best environments in which such learning occurs.

Changes in the role and composition of the family, the work-force and the role of paid employment, the development of robots and microcomputers, video and its attendant activities have wrought tremendously powerful changes in our society, and hence in our educational values.

About 10-20% of families today consist of one parent families and apart from some ethnic groups, our 'typical family' is at best a nuclear two generation with about 1.8 children. As a result children do not have the opportunity to see members of the older generation, cousins, aunts, uncles, or grow up with siblings. Consequently there is a lessening opportunity to develop a concept of 'caring' for the old, the young or the disabled. Older children do not act as substitute caregivers for younger siblings, nor do young children have those older siblings for support when mum or dad decide to act like tyrants by limited TV viewing or making the children undertake some minor household chore. Care, as a concept must be included in any preschool curriculum, if our society is to survive into the twenty-first century.

One of the more interesting features of our changing social and economic system has been the decline of the 'child centred' family. We are living in a world in which the child-dominated family appears to be in a decline.

In the 1980's children were no longer viewed as the centre of the family world and their needs were more likely to be seen as equal to, but no greater than, that of their parents. In fact there is an increasing vocalisation of ideas that children are a financial liability or a luxury! The most interesting point is that at the same time we appear to have reverted to the notion of the child as the miniature adult, e.g. in Elkind's book, The Hurried Child they note that we dress children in designer jeans, Gucci shoes, etc. In other words, as a miniature adult as in days gone by. Linked with this notion of accelerated childhood is the perception by some so-called 'experts' is the notion of hothouse education. Over the past decade there has been a push to accelerate children's learning so that formal learning begins at an earlier age, often when the child is still an infant. It began in the 1960's with Glen Doman's book, Teach Your Baby to Read, and by the 1980's the push had a very pushy title - the 'fast track' or 'hothouse' approach to learning which attempted to accelerate cognitive and language skills in order to assist the young child's development at school. These 'hothouse' programs often include activities designed to assist the young child to become computer-literate as well, in keeping with the western world's knowledge of technology.

The literature suggests that these jump-started children are able to demonstrate skill with abstract symbols, spend more time in formal instruction and engage in structured, success-oriented competitive activities in lieu of self-directed dramatic play and other activities which help the young child to understand and use their experiences. Fein has summed up the hothouse approach very succinctly in this way:

'The problem of 'hothousing' lies not in asking so much, or even too much of our children, but in asking it non-negotiably too soon.'

(Fein, 1987, p.228)

Other opponents of hothousing have responded by writing books and articles rebutting the hothouse concept which argue that the world is becoming more and more complex and children need a longer time to grow and develop in a more secure environment in order to cope with this complex civilisation. While I support this notion and would argue that the early childhood worker has a vital role to play in this task, I find it difficult to support a notion which appears under such emotive and provocative titles as 'Children in the Fast Lane', 'The Hurried Child', 'The Disappearance of Childhood', 'Trying to Jump Start Toddlers', and 'Does Hothousing Rob Children of their Childhood?'

One of the other areas I mentioned in the changing scene was the idea of jobs - that is, paid employment - being perceived as both financially and emotionally rewarding. In the USA in the 1970's there developed the notion that jobs were part of a person's total career pattern in combination with 'vocation' and 'leisure'. The career education proponents define 'jobs' as activities which contribute to basic survival needs, that is, attracting money on a full-time, part-time or casual basics. It does not necessarily include any form of self-satisfaction. 'Vocation' on the other hand, refers to activities which do provide a sense of self-worth or self-fulfilment; they are usually unpaid, unconnected with job and may include community volunteer work or raising a family. For people such as us, the idea of separating job and vocation seems very improbable, but the idea is not unknown to the countless thousands already working in factories, in industry and marketing whose jobs are repetitive and require no opportunity for self-fulfilment. The problem is exacerbated if people such as those I have described have no opportunity to pursue a vocation or lack the skills to know how and where to seek a vocation. The third component of career education is 'leisure' which includes those activities which contribute to recreation and aesthetic pleasures such as watching TV, attending a rock concert, walking the dog briskly around the park for several laps or even weeding the garden.

In other words, career education is concerned with learning to live and extends from birth to death. It follows then that children need to be able to feel good about themselves, to feel that they can initiate activities and to be exposed to a range of experiences, activities and skills so they can make realistic choices during those periods of leisure and the pursuit of a vocation; children will need to develop the confidence to try new experiences, to use their time in ways that are satisfying to them and to generate a belief in their ability to take responsibility for their lives. These skills have their genesis in the kindergarten.

A third area of change which requires the attention of kindergarten workers is that of the growing dependence of our society upon state of the art technology. Their role is to understand the parameters of such technology in order to make informed decisions about the skills and attitudes the kindergarten aged child would need to possess in order to utilise the capacities of such technology in areas such as communication, computation and the disseminating of information. However, it is prudent to inject a note of caution, while there is a growing tendency for preschools to purchase word processors prolonged exposure to computer games may be viewed in twenty years time as a causal factor in producing an adult generation of passive

myopic, non-social people whose knowledge of the world is basically vicarious but vast.

Professor Neil Postman of New York University, who has been an outspoken opponent of the erosion of childhood, outlined his beliefs about technological change in the following way at an Early Childhood Conference in Tel Aviv in 1987:

> *'All technological change is a Faustian bargain. This means that for every advantage a new technology offers, there is always a corresponding disadvantage. The disadvantage may exceed in importance the advantage, or the advantage may well be worth the cost. But nothing comes free, especially technology.'*
>
> *(1987, p.5)*

Postman used the visit of Professor Jacques Ellul of France to support his argument that the young child - and adults as well - must feel they are able to use technology rather than be dominated by it:

> *'Confronted with the technological phenomenon and the new milieu we live in, we must have 'mutants'. Not the mutants of science fiction - the technological human beings with a robot's mind - but quite the opposite. To be mutant, a person needs to become someone who can use the technologies and at the same time not be used by them, assimilated by them, or subordinated to them.'*
>
> *(Postman, 1987, p.3)*

Ellul is of course referring to intellectual deviants - people who, through education and insight, are 'capable of distancing themselves from the new and alluring technologies that are so eager to engulf them ... A generation of people who are in control of their minds, their values and their future' (Postman, 1987, p.4)

Greta Fein has taken up this notion of the effects of technology on the young. She has put forward the premise that there are two conditions which must prevail if an innovation is to survive; first it must be seen to be essential to the emotional, economic or political survival of the community, and secondly it must be transmitted to the younger generation. Literacy is a classic example of this proposition. Technology has made dramatic changes to the concept of literacy, for instance, over the past four hundred years. In the sixteenth century, those children who went to school attended at the age of thirteen or fourteen, whereas our contemporary society considers that literacy begins at babyhood when a baby of ten or so months will look at a book, bang it or perhaps turn the pages. By twelve months of age Fein suggests the baby might bring a book to an adult, climb on the adult's lap, and wait expectantly for the adult to read the book. For these babies the book is part of the social discourse of the day, but for me the important thing is that the baby has made the connection between the object and the possibilities for enjoyment which could follow. In other words, the baby is in control of their own learning.

Perhaps the most pervasive example of the misuse of technology is the world of television and video. In the past, education has thrived on, and indeed relied on, the printed word, whereas the world of television relies on imagery, narrative, emotional

response, gratuitous violence, immediate gratification and all problems solved and all baddies defeated and wrongs righted within the allotted time slot, give or take a few commercials.

Where does this leave our young children, the adults of the twenty-first century? Where does it leave the early childhood worker? And probably most importantly, what can we offer young children in the face of such compelling, contemporary technology as a buffer for future technology?

What can early childhood workers do to try to ensure that children are allowed to experience childhood and a period of self-motivated learning? Firstly, we should acknowledge that the changes I have described are great and probably irreversible; that the technology of the 1980's is here to stay - or at least until it is superseded by a more efficient model, that work will not be the province for all and for those who do work it may be sporadic and emotionally unrewarding, that families will decrease in size and alter in composition and caring may become simply a word in the dictionary, that more children may become stressed by hothouse pressures, family situations and the need to succeed and that knowledge for its own sake may become as obsolete as the steam train, while an increased commitment to ecological concerns may just save our plant for another generation or two.

Having delved into the future it may be timely to look at the more placid, slow paced life of our ancestors. Ashby (1988) suggested that it is a well known fact that historians, sociologists and others who desire to know what lies ahead look to the past and try to discern trends from earlier times. It is probably as good a way as any for us to try to determine what lies in the future for early childhood educators.

We all know that contemporary early childhood services had their genesis in the work of eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophers and educators such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Frederick Froebel, Maria Montessori and Rachel and Margaret McMillan. Those amongst us who are more erudite could name others such as John Amos Comenius and Robert Owen, and there is no doubt that all these people form a strong chain in terms of demonstrating and determining the initial role of the early childhood educator. Each of these people reinforced the idea of the teacher being the dominant factor in any early childhood program; programs which were designed to make the children good exemplars of the society in which they lived. Some of their ideas and activities, particularly those of Montessori, have enjoyed a recent resurgence of interest, at least in modified forms, and every kindergarten has a home corner and a block corner, inset boards and nesting cups as a reminder of Montessori's influence.

However, Ashby suggests that their beliefs no longer hold any real position of influence in our contemporary society. This is an outrageous proposition because I am sure that everyone here today has been indoctrinated with the notion that these people were the grandparents of early childhood. And so they were, but times change. Just as the Siliac computer at Sydney University of the 1960's was the grandparent - or the great-grandparent - of the 'laptop portable' computer of 1988, so these educators played a crucial role in establishing early childhood programs as necessary and viable. However time has caught up with them, and their idea that the teacher was the director, similar to a kind of circus ringmaster, who was in charge of all learning and who directed each child towards an appropriate activity, has passed.

More important to us in the 1980's has been the work of the child psychologists of the 1920's and 1930's, such as Arnold Gesell, Patty Smith-Hill and Susan Isaacs. They have provided us with clear insights into the way in which most children grow and develop and have offered us strategies for observing and interpreting children's development as a basis for individual learning. In addition they served to demonstrate that the potential for development possessed by all young children could be destroyed by lack of appropriate experience and/or opportunity. Their ideas changed, for all time, the role and function of the early childhood teacher - he or she was not so much a teacher/director but someone who prepared an appropriate environment so that learning could occur. During the last thirty years or so researchers from other disciplines have turned their attention to matters concerned with early childhood education. The anthropologist, Margaret Mead, is a typical example. She determined that all teachers could be classified under three headings, first, the grandparent; this was the teacher who had seen a great deal of life (perhaps felt that he or she had 'done it all') and who could join all the pieces together to construct a total teaching package. Unfortunately this 'grandparent' type was not able to demonstrate any flexibility or formulate any alternatives to those contained in the package; secondly, the parent; Mead described this teacher as one who could see all the opportunities for early education in terms of the child's future success and because of this, tended to value achievement and success and in the process might place pressures on the child. To make a loose analogy this could describe the hothousing process currently in vogue; and thirdly, the child-nurse; Mead described this teacher as one who was concerned with the well-being of the child, rather than expressing concerns about society's values, about materialism or about 'success' per se. The child-nurse saw themselves, according to Mead, as the ally of childhood, the rebel with a cause, that of preserving childhood as a concept and helping children towards independence rather than to knowledge per se.

Mead paid the early childhood educator the supreme compliment by suggesting that the child-nurse, the rebel with a cause, the ally of children, who saw 'children' as more important than 'learning' was only to be found among early childhood teachers. While the child-nurse was seen to be peculiar to the early years, unfortunately the other two Mead-types, namely the grandparent and the parent, permeated all levels of education, including early childhood. For Mead, the good early childhood teacher does not manipulate children or even direct their learning, she or he simply organises an environment so that the child can do its own learning. To use jargon it is about promoting self-learning through the child's motivation, with social and emotional learning being an equal partner in the process of children's learning, together with cognitive and physical learning.

The idea of self-learning on the part of the young child made early learning different from later learning and early education was redefined (according to Ashby) to stand for protecting the rights, interests and welfare of young children as well as promoting their learning.

Audrey Curtis, an English educator who has visited us on more than one occasion, has used the philosophy of R.S.Peters as a basis for an early childhood program. Peters, in Ethics and Education (1966) argued that we have to include in our kindergarten program anything and everything that is 'worthwhile'. This is anything in which the child is totally absorbed and the activities are 'infinitely extendable'; the

main point being that the involvement for the young child is in the process, i.e. the activity itself, not the product.

Curtis argues three main premises, namely that early childhood education is about challenging children and encouraging them to develop into worthwhile learners and thinkers, full of curiosity about the world around them; that there is a recognisable curriculum for children of preschool age based on skills and competencies to be developed in a flexible, child-centred environment and that there exists ample material with which to extend and challenge children of this age without offering them a watered down primary school program. Curtis lists seven skill areas which she believes can be appropriately developed through play with the teacher acting as the facilitator in a supportive environment; self-awareness skills, social skills, cultural skills, communication skills, perceptual and motor skills, analytical and problem-solving skills and creative/aesthetic skills. Several of these skills areas deserve further explanation.

Self-awareness skills include feelings about self, body and sensory awareness and body control, while cultural awareness presumes a growing understanding of the children's relationship between themselves and the environment including an understanding of similarities and differences among all groups of people including one and two parent families, extended and blended families, life in towns and country and jobs within a community.

However radical this may appear, I believe Curtis' piéce de resistance is her notion of social skills. This is the most detailed skill area in Curtis' list and involves the young child in learning that acceptable behaviour within the family may be very different from acceptable behaviour in the wider community. They learn ways of interacting effectively with adults and children outside the family - particularly their peer group. Curtis nominates four major subgroups of social skills in her program; one of these is affiliation skills, or the ability to co-operate and work with others, a most necessary skill in our highly socialised society in Curtis' eyes. It involves the young child being able to develop the ability to identify socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in themselves and others and to understand the consequences of such behaviours, e.g. if you take toys from other children then you become a social isolate; skills such as joining in groups, managing encounters and extricating oneself from a situation in an acceptable manner are skills included by Curtis in the area of affiliation. Curtis argues that children who do not learn such rituals can very easily become social isolates and will require adult assistance.

Another area of social skills in Curtis' program is co-operation and the resolution of conflicts; these are natural results of young children gaining entry into a group, as they will want to influence the behaviour of others. A child who is socially competent is adept at both leadership and followship roles, whereas a child who feels inadequate and feels that life is overwhelming and is unable to make or accept decisions made by others is likely to resort to aggressive behaviour in order to influence other children. Young children therefore need to learn skills to enable them to identify the cause of conflict, understand reasons for rules and practise their sharing behaviour in a positive environment.

Curtis' third sub-group involves kindness, care and affection; she believes that the ability to display empathy, care and affection contributes to social skills (this ability to show kindness is made possible by the belief in our own worth, so if children

perceive themselves as socially competent and respected by others, they are more likely to display nurturant acts). But Curtis is clear that children have to understand the difference between 'giving' and 'sharing'. e.g. You give a lolly but you share a toy. Pro-social behaviour is relevant but other behaviour is not, such as saying, 'I'm sorry'.

Obviously social skills are the lynchpin of Curtis' curriculum but she is also very definite regarding the development of analytical and problem-solving skills in the young child and she uses a quote from de Bono to emphasise her point:

> *'Children can be brilliant thinkers ... a child enjoys thinking. He enjoys the use of his mind just as he enjoys the use of his body as he slides down a helter-skelter or bounces on a trampoline ... If children can already think so well at this age, then surely the long years of education must develop this ability to a high level. Not so, at the end of education there has been no improvement in the thinking ability of children, in fact there has actually been a deterioration.'*
>
> *(de Bono: 1972.8)*

She argues that because young children have only limited experiences which causes them to be limited in terms of perception and ability to conserve and reverse, they are not deficient thinkers who can explore, question, compare, contrast, label and form mental images in ways that reveal their individuality. Clearly Curtis' ideas do not fit in with the hothouse proponents but reveal an updated, contemporary version of the 1950's and 1960's concept of the early childhood educator who promotes individual growth and development through self-motivation.

While I applaud Curtis' clear thinking I believe we need to add a further three skills to her list; namely, coping and caring skills, ecological awareness skills and technological skills.

Now for the grand plan; a synthesis of all these admirable ideas which take account of the social, economic and technological changes and could produce a lifelong curriculum which looks something like this:

(i) intellectual skills, i.e. problem-solving skills for appreciating other people and things and the environment; cultural awareness, ecological awareness, creative/aesthetic awareness;

(ii) decision-making skills, i.e. those skills concerned with making a decision in a complex situation where consequences accrue from that situation;

(iii) general physical and mechanical skills, i.e. skills that allow the young person to deal with mechanical and physical problems that they will confront in the home and elsewhere but outside the work situation; using a computer as a tool, handwriting, spelling, using references, following oral and written instructions, e.g. using a screwdriver and other common tools, repairing and mending of household objects;

(iv) bureaucratic and organisation skills, i.e. knowing how to cope with free time, free choice of activities, knowing how to organise resources, knowing how to operate a keyboard; knowing when to be a leader and when to be a follower in a group;

(v) skills in the care of dependent persons, i.e. skills involved in caring for children (parenting skills), old persons and those who are sick;

(vi) emergency skills, i.e. skills in knowing how to act in an emergency or an

unfamiliar situation, including coping and stress-reducing skills;

(vii) verbal communication skills, including interpersonal skills which would involve Curtis' conflict resolution, assertiveness, affiliation skills and co-operation skills.

These are fine words and such skills would seem to be axiomatic for any stage of educational development, but the question remains - How can they be achieved in the kindergarten of the 1990's?

First, we should argue that early childhood programs, whether they are called preschools, kindergartens, early entry classes or whatever, are there to preserve the concept of 'childhood'; let us replace hothouse with greenhouse. In order to achieve this we must emphasise the traditional and unchanging tenet of early childhood programs; that is, the idea of self-learning on the part of the young child.

Secondly, we should acknowledge the need for programs to be individual in order to cater for the needs of families and children in particular communities; they should also be flexible enough to cater for society's changes provided that they strike a balance between conservation and change. Flexibility must not be seen to be a lack of understanding of the need to preserve childhood.

Thirdly, we must enlist the committed interest and co-operation of parents. It may be that we do not have a choice in this regard if we wish to survive. Parents need to understand and appreciate the work of centres in the lives of children. They need to understand more about child development and the way we work to cater for the independent and individual needs of young children. If we maintain an air of mystique about our work then we can hardly expect parents to support us when government cuts are mooted. In other words, there needs to be a real partnership between parents and teachers in which both sides recognise that they have a real role to play in the young child's development.

With regard to the idea of parent involvement and participation in early childhood programs, one of the more innovative programs emanating from the United Kingdom is the Home Visiting Program for isolated areas. These programs use educational home visitors who visit homes for about an hour each week. These trained early childhood persons aim to 'encourage the mothers to play their unique and irreplaceable part in promoting the educational development of their children.' One of the major emphases of the program is helping mothers appreciate the importance of play. The content is less innovative than the methods which are used; mothers are <u>not</u> trained to act like teachers, but rather the <u>teachers</u> adopt the non-authoritarian manner which is relevant for the mother. This is labelled the 'effective mothering' technique and is designed to stimulate in the young child characteristics such as independence, autonomous learning, self-confidence, confidence in dealing with others and willingness to try unknowns - all skills needed for coping with the twenty-first century. Presumably an effective mothering technique enhances such positive characteristics. The argument is that while teachers may be good at conveying knowledge, mothers can assist growth. Some of the home visitors in the Lothian area have suggested that they have a great deal to learn from mothers about facilitating growth rather than fostering obedience, conformity, dependence and cognitive learning which appear to go hand in hand with the more traditional teaching techniques.

Fourthly, we must revise our programs in order to keep pace with the status and needs of young children; in a time of high parent interest in intellectual aims it is essential that early childhood programmes include broader objectives and aims.

There are any number of reports, papers and books on the topic of appropriate learning experiences for the young child of the 1990's. I will quote four in support of my argument.

The report of the ACEI (The Association for Childhood Education International) published a report of a study in its newsletter in 1988 relating to the place of the 3 R's in our curriculum of the year 2000. The study suggested that the 3 R's could well be replaced by the 4 C's of critical thinking, coping, communication and comprehension, and finished up with this quote:

> *'The 4 C's are going to be vital to survival and success in a more sophisticated future.'*

Keliher (1986), on the other hand, has taken up the topic of 'not back to basics but forward to fundamentals' and related it to the education of young children. She suggests that where the education of young children is concerned there are five fundamental propositions which we must recall. Firstly, each child is unique in terms of talents, interests and ways of learning; secondly, each child has different levels of ability within these talents; thirdly, that real learning only occurs when it is embedded in a meaningful experience for a particular child; fourthly, children need a good teacher who is interested in them as people, who enjoys seeing them grow in strength and knowledge, who listens to them and knows and accepts their strengths and weaknesses; and fifthly, there needs to be this real partnership between parents and teachers in which both sides recognise that they have a real role to play in the young child's development.

For many years society did not consider that it needed to be concerned with young children per se; rather than some mystical combination of 'good genetic endowment (and) the accident of birth into a family of sufficient means (Cartwright and Seaver, 1977:21) was all that was required to achieve growth; now thanks to the contribution of psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, educators and other researchers that normal, healthy, four year olds will learn at a fairly rapid rate, even in a mildly stimulating environment (Eastman, 1989). The task of the kindergarten is to ensure that the 'what', the 'how' and the 'why' of that learning take account of the changes in our world and the changes in educational planning to respond to those changes. The way in which educators at the kindergarten level respond to this challenge could well influence the remainder of the educative process.

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